

Retired chaplain brings inspirational message to breakfast

by Rachel Newton

Retired chaplain Dale Mackey has an interesting story to tell. A story filled with heartache, hardship, compassion and thankfulness. "I am glad to be an American, aren't you?" he said as he addressed a full house during a prayer breakfast at Pine Bluff Arsenal March 2.

Born in Fukuoka, Japan, Mackey's mother was Japanese and his father was an American serviceman. "I consider myself part of the melting pot. When I go to south Texas, they ask me when I crossed the river. When I am in Oklahoma, they ask me what tribe I'm with," he said laughing. "When I'm in Hawaii, they put their arm around me and ask me what island I'm from."

Mackey said that he really appreciates the efforts by President George Bush right now. "The president is leading us at a difficult time. We are again in a time of war – and not just a conventional war but a war against terrorism," he said. "What I appreciate about this great man is he is not ashamed of talking about his faith. He is not ashamed to talk about his dependence on God."

Our Soldiers are going through a very hard and difficult time, said Mackey, who served in the U.S. Army as a medic from 1970 to 1973. He was commissioned as an Army chaplain in October 1982 and served in various assignments, including a two-year deployment overseas in Japan, from 1982 until 1992. "This is not a war like any we have faced before," he said. "They are ravaged by bombs and are being maimed and destroyed by terrorists and things that are not seen."

The sacrifice of a Soldier is exactly what it means, said Mackey, who currently works as an oncology registered nurse in bone marrow transplant – multiple myeloma unit at University Hospital in Little Rock. "It means to give. To give everything and hold nothing back," he said. "We have the best military in the world. The best trained, the best equipped to do the job we are doing. I'm thankful that we have Soldiers that are doing their jobs and that we still have our freedoms."

Mackey said that his father was an American Soldier, stationed in Japan after World War II. "I always said that my father was an American Soldier – he wore Army green. I was taken in by an Army military family and brought to the United States, and later became a U.S. citizen," he said. "Later, I became a Soldier during the Vietnam conflict and then a chaplain. I said if you cut me I bleed Army green."

Mackey explained that he is the product of an occupation of a country after a great war concluded. When his mother later married a Japanese man, this individual did not want to raise a mixed-race son.

"Fortunately for me I was adopted by an American Army family when I was seven," he said. "We talk about discrimination in this country. You do not know what discrimination is until you see people look right through you like you do not exist. When I was hungry and wanted something to eat, I was of no concern because I was half-Japanese and half-American. They would not even offer me a morsel to eat. I know how to be hungry."

Mackey said that his adoptive family was very kind to him. "God has a hand in all of our lives. Everything that happens to you, he is there touching you whether you believe it or not," he said. "When my adoptive mother, Ramona Mackey, looked at me the day we first met she told me that she had dreamed of me and had been looking for me for six months. I remember the meeting and I will never forget that day. That is how it was. That is the way God does things."

Later, Mackey said that his adoptive mother shared something that is very special to him. "She said you know I have had my other children by natural birth and I love them just as much as I love you. I love you just a little special because God gave you to me in a dream," he said. "She said God has special work for you and that there is something real special he wants you to do."

He says that he is grateful for many things. "I'm grateful first of all to be a Christian," he said. "Secondly, I'm proud to be an American."

Lt. Col. Searless Hathaway, deputy director of Law Enforcement and Security, presented the invocation and prayer during the breakfast. She thanked everyone for praying for her son, Leonard, who recently returned from Iraq. "A group of us used to get together at lunch time and pray," she said.

“One of our prayers was that all of our Soldiers would come back safely if that was the Lord’s will. I always knew that it was the Lord’s will that my son would come back safely.”